BRILLIANT CLASSICS
Summer Dreams
American Piano Duets
MacDowell · Beach · Barber
Emma Abbate & Julian Perkins

Summer Dreams

American Piano Duets

Edward MacDowell 1860-1908

Three Poems Op.20 *

1.	Night by the Sea	4’25
2.	A Tale from Knightly Times	3’25
3.	Ballad	3’30

Moon Pictures Op.21 *

4.	The Hindoo Maiden	2’21
5.	Story of the Stork	1’38
6.	In the Tyrol	3’33
7.	The Swan	2’53
8.	Visit of the Bear	1’41

Hamlet and Ophelia Op.22 *

9.	Hamlet	7’09
10.	Ophelia	6’22

Amy Beach 1867-1944

Three Movements

11.	Allegro appassionato	1’42
12.	Moderato	2’53
13.	Allegro con fuoco	3’33

Summer Dreams Op.47

14.	The Brownies	3’27
15.	Robin Redbreast	1’48
16.	Twilight	2’16
17.	Katy-dids	0’53
18.	Elfin Tarantelle	1’51
19.	Good Night	3’36

Justine Marler *narrator*

Samuel Barber 1910-1981

Souvenirs Op.28

20.	Waltz	4’13
21.	Schottische	2’36
22.	Pas de deux	3’53
23.	Two-Step	1’46
24.	Hesitation-Tango	3’46
25.	Galop	2’57

** first recording*

Four hands, one piano:
Emma Abbate *primo* & Julian Perkins *secondo*

Both Beach and MacDowell were formidably accomplished pianists who wrote concertos in barnstorming virtuoso style, for themselves and their contemporaries to play, but they could also turn their hands to the lucrative domestic market for piano-duet music. In doing so they also tapped into the 19th-century, Romantic preoccupation with childhood which Schumann had encapsulated in his *Kinderszenen* of 1838.

MacDowell wrote his *Moon Pictures* Op.21 in the winter of 1884-5, and subtitled them 'after H.C. Andersen's Picture-Book without Pictures', referring to an 1848 collection of short bedtime stories. The opening movement evokes Andersen's vision of a Hindu girl, 'light as the gazelle, beautiful as Eve... There is scarcely anything so airy and yet so affluent in the luxuriance of beauty, as the daughter of India.' MacDowell based 'The Story of the Stork' on the 13th episode in the collection, and in its tripping rhythms we may see as well as hear the children at play outside their cottages before the gentle coda brings news of the new addition to the family associated with the unseen arrival of the stork, a bundle of joy (for now) in its beak.

No.3 of the *Moon Pictures* is set in the landscape of the Tyrol. Two nuns ring the bell for Vespers. A solemn hymn rises and falls on the air. Momentum picks up to show a travelling carriage in the valley below, and the bell and the hymn sound over it before stillness returns. 'The Swan' of the collection's fourth movement is wearied by its journey and sinks earthwards, 'like a soap-bubble in the still air; it touched the surface of the water, bowed back its head between its wings, and lay still, like a white lotus upon the calm Indian Sea.' In the final story of *Moon Pictures*, a bear is led into town by his itinerant master, and inspected by a trio of little children. The bear joins in the children's game of soldiers – a little march ensues – before their mother arrives, and the fun stops.

Published in 1901 and dedicated to the composer's niece, the six duets of the album's title collection, *Summer Dreams* by Beach, are technically simpler than the *Moon Pictures*, but they are prefaced by literary quotations which once more indicate that this is not music for children so much as music for adults to play to children, and for adults to play at being children. In any case, simpler means and fewer notes need hardly imply naivety of expression, and Beach's self-taught technique was too rigorous to allow anything less than the most deftly fashioned work to escape her desk.

'The Brownies' is a fleet-footed, Mendelssohnian scherzo, headed by Oberon's invocation from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: 'Through the house give glimmering light/By the dead and drowsy fire/Every elf and fairy sprite/Hop as light as bird from brier.' Beach had previously set this text as a partsong for female chorus in the last of her *Three Shakespeare Choruses* of 1897.

A robin pecks and chirps in waltz time in the second of the *Summer Dreams*, and Beach supplies her own preface to the Largo religioso of the third: 'The birds have hushed themselves to rest/And Night comes fast to drop her pall/Till Morn brings life to all.' The katydid is a North American insect, similar to a grasshopper and named after its distinctive call which Whitman immortalises in Beach's chosen quotation over No.4: 'The katy-did works her chromatic reed/On the walnut tree over the well.'

The 'Elfin Tarantelle' of No.5 returns to the Shakespearean, nocturnal world of No.1, and Beach brings her cycle to rest with a nocturne which takes its title from a poem by her friend Agnes Lockhart Hughes, 'Good Night'. Beach made synaesthetic associations between colours and tonalities, and the predominant C major of this finale is her 'white' key, with excursions into the A flat of her 'blue' key, mirroring Lockhart's evocation of 'Night's starry eyes'.

Composed in 1883, Beach's brief *Three Movements* for piano duet are the work of a prodigiously talented teenager who knows her early-Romantic piano literature – including *Kinderszenen* – inside out, but who also understands at this stage how to emulate rather than merely copy her models. No.1 is a Schubertian march in its gently offbeat humour and bittersweet harmony. The contemplative No.2 is more exploratory in its harmonic movement, and the finale returns to a Schubertian world in which Beach's marking of Allegro con fuoco is somewhat belied by the contented nature of her material.

In the following year of 1884, the 23-year-old MacDowell wrote his *Three Poems* Op.20. A grave chord sequence introduces the first of them, 'Night by the Sea', before a rich bass line evokes the rolling and lapping waves with a Whitmanesque majesty. This yields to a more ardent central section focused on a yearning melody in the lower voice, offset by glittering parallel upper harmonies. The rolling waves return, the atmosphere transfigured in a sumptuous D flat major.

No.2 is 'A Tale from Knightly Times', which immediately sallies forth, Allegro eroico, like a nobleman on his steed, mane flying in the wind. Thus the central section in this case is contrastingly romantic in mood, before modulations in the reprise ratchet up the tension towards a triumphant homecoming.

The third and last of the Poems is cast in the archetypally Romantic form of the 'Ballad'. The Allegretto placido marking sets the scene only for the opening pages of the story: the form in this case is more free-flowing, embracing a waltz-like melody and rising to peaks of tempestuous passion before subsiding to rapt coda, all in the space of less than four minutes.

Strictly speaking, *Hamlet and Ophelia* is the outlier in this collection, since MacDowell composed it in 1894 as a tone-poem for orchestra in the Lisztian manner, and then made this two-piano transcription rather than leaving the work to the kind of professional arranger habitually commissioned by publishers for such treatment. Nevertheless he took the kind of care over it that Brahms did in arranging his symphonies, and the piano-duet version retains the brooding tension of the opening and effectively transfers the violinistic surges of Hamlet's main section to the keyboard.

The album's final collection takes a chronological leap forward to 1952, but its nostalgia-drenched mood belongs to an intermediate age. 'One might imagine a divertissement in a setting of the Palm Court at the Plaza Hotel,' Barber explained in a letter to his publisher, 'the year about 1914, epoch of the first tangos. *Souvenirs* – remembered with affection, not in irony or with tongue in cheek, but in amused tenderness.' Barber, it should be noted, would have been four years old at the time, and so these are 'souvenirs' in the manner of sepia-tinted postcards.

Six dances make up Barber's suite: Waltz, Schottische, Pas de deux, Two-Step, Hesitation-Tango, and Galop. They are coloured by post-Stravinskian melodic intervals and harmonies even while the dance rhythms (not excluding the delightful 5/4 section in the Waltz) are those of an earlier century. The circumstances of its composition perhaps contribute to the escapist feel of the suite, which is dedicated to Charles Turner, a pianist friend of the composer. Turner recalled Barber having fallen into a dry spell after the success of the Piano Sonata. Barber remarked to him: 'When I look at the music paper I feel frightened. I can't think of anything.' Turner replied, 'Why don't you write a party piece, something we can play at parties?' *Souvenirs* is the result. Turner also recalled Barber frequenting a bar called the Blue Angel, where two resident pianists known as Edie and Rack played 'rather sophisticated cabaret music.' The suite took on a second life when Lincoln Kirstein – with George Balanchine, co-founder of New York City Ballet – commissioned Barber to orchestrate it for a ballet, but the scale of the original piano-duo version best suits the carefree mood of music written firstly to give pleasure to its performers, as do all the best piano duets.

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Emma Abbate and **Julian Perkins** have given duo recitals for the Mozart Society of America and at many UK venues including the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, St George's Bristol, St John's Smith Square, Hatchlands Park and the Russell Collection, Edinburgh. Praised for their "impressive sensitivity" (*Early Music Reviews*) and for telling "a totally convincing story with every piece" (*The Arts Desk*), their recordings have received five-star reviews in *BBC Music Magazine* and *Het Nieuwsblad*. Their latest disc, *Tournament for Twenty Fingers*, features music by 20th-century English composers and was selected by Scala Radio as Album of the Weekend.

The Neapolitan pianist **Emma Abbate** enjoys a demanding career as a piano accompanist and chamber musician. Described as "an amazingly talented pianist" by the leading Italian magazine *Musica*, she has performed in duo recitals for international festivals and concert societies throughout Europe and at UK venues such as the Aldeburgh Festival, Wigmore Hall and Southbank Centre. She also regularly broadcasts on BBC Radio 3 and has recently presented an episode of *Inside Music*.

Emma is making a series of acclaimed recordings devoted to 20th-century Italian vocal chamber music, the latest of which is the world-première of Franco Alfano›s songs with the leading Italian soprano Anna Pirozzi. Other recordings in the series include *Sera d'inverno: Songs by Ildebrando Pizzetti* with mezzo-soprano Hanna Hipp, and *Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco: Shakespeare Sonnets* with bass-baritone Ashley Riches. A keen advocate of contemporary music, Emma has released two discs devoted to works by Stephen Dodgson that include his piano quintets with the Tippett Quartet. She also cultivates an active interest in historical keyboards, and has recorded on a rangeof original instruments from the Finchcocks Charity.

Based in London, Emma is a professor at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and a staff coach at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Described as "exuberantly stylish" by the *Sunday Times*, **Julian Perkins** is Artistic Director of the Portland Baroque Orchestra in Oregon, USA. Based in the UK, he is also Artistic Director of Cambridge Handel Opera and Sounds Baroque. He often performs at the Salzburg Festival, has directed groups ranging from the Academy of Ancient Music to the Orchestra of Welsh National Opera, and featured as soloist in concertos with groups such as the Royal Northern Sinfonia, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Florilegium.

Julian has appeared as solo harpsichordist/fortepianist at the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and Welsh National Opera, among others. He broadcasts regularly on the *BBC Early Music Show* and *In Tune*, and has performed as a soloist at London's Wigmore Hall, New York's Lincoln Center and Sydney Opera House. Shortlisted for the 2021 Gramophone Award for his recording of John Eccles' *Semele*, Julian's playing and conducting has been praised in print for its "demonic intensity" (*BBC Music Magazine* – Recording of the Month) and "fluid and natural pacing" (*Gramophone* – Editor's Choice), conducting "as if every bar means the world to him" (*Opera* – Disc of the Month). In August 2023, his latest solo clavichord disc, *Handel's Attick*, was Instrumental Choice in *BBC Music Magazine*.

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